

The Impact of The Gig Economy on The Vietnamese Labor Market

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Received: September 3, 2025 Accepted: October 2, 2025 Published: October 4, 2025

doi:10.5296/ber.v15i4.23195 URL: <https://doi.org/10.5296/ber.v15i4.23195>

Abstract

The gig economy, also referred to as the contract economy or freelance economy, represents an economic model in which individuals typically engage in part-time, temporary, or contract-based work rather than full-time employment with a single company. While the concept is not new globally, it remains relatively novel in Vietnam. With its inherent flexibility and advantages, the gig economy in Vietnam has been exerting multifaceted impacts on the labor market. This paper examines both the positive and negative effects of the gig economy on Vietnam's labor market and proposes policy recommendations to enhance labor regulations and worker protection mechanisms. The study employs qualitative methods, using secondary data from official statistics and reputable surveys, supplemented by a questionnaire survey of 490 workers in major cities. Findings reveal that while the gig economy expands labor supply, increases flexibility, and creates new opportunities, it also poses challenges related to job stability, social protection, and skill development.

Keywords: Gig economy, Labor market, Freelance wor, Vietnam

1. Introduction

The emergence and development of the gig economy are closely associated with the advancement of digital technologies (ILO, 2018; OECD, 2019). Over the past decade, research on the gig economy has expanded globally, reflecting its robust growth trajectory and diverse impacts on labor markets. In Vietnam, the gig economy is gaining momentum, driven by technological adoption, demographic shifts, and global integration.

2. Research Overview

Globally, the gig economy has attracted the interest of numerous international organizations, reflecting its robust growth trajectory and its diverse impacts on labor markets.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has published numerous in-depth reports on the platform economy and informal employment. One notable publication is the report *“Digital Labour Platforms and the Future of Work: Towards Decent Work in the Online World”* (2018), in which the ILO analyzes the working conditions, rights, and risks faced by gig workers worldwide. The report emphasizes that the majority of gig workers are not protected under traditional labor laws, resulting in instability and heightened vulnerability in terms of income and social security.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has also conducted extensive research on the impact of the gig economy on social policy and labor markets. Its report *“The Future of Work: OECD Employment Outlook 2019”* devotes an entire chapter to platform-based work, highlighting that the rise of gig employment poses significant challenges to social insurance systems and human resource management. The OECD has also collaborated with the World Bank on studies related to innovation and technology, which address the role of the gig economy in driving digital transformation.

The McKinsey Global Institute conducted a large-scale survey of over 8,000 workers in the United States and Europe, presented in the report *“Independent Work: Choice, Necessity, and the Gig Economy”* (2016). This study categorizes forms of gig work based on the degree of voluntariness versus necessity, and assesses their impact on income, flexibility, and access to social benefits. Findings indicate that approximately 20–30% of gig workers choose this model for its flexibility, while the majority remain concerned about instability and the lack of legal protection.

The World Bank has undertaken multiple studies on the digital economy and informal employment in developing countries. Its report *“The Digital Economy in Southeast Asia: Strengthening the Foundations for Future Growth”* notes that the gig economy is expanding rapidly in Southeast Asia, including Vietnam, driven by the proliferation of digital platforms and the demand for flexible work. Furthermore, a joint report by the World Bank and the OECD on innovation in Vietnam also discusses the gig economy’s impact in the context of digital transformation, particularly with regard to small enterprises and freelance workers.

In Vietnam, research on the gig economy has been increasingly conducted in recent years, including the following notable studies:

Pham, V. H. (2023) in research “Workers in the Gig Economy: Opportunities and Challenges for the Vietnamese Labor Market” – *Journal of Economics and Forecasting*, provided an overview of the current status of Vietnamese workers in the gig economy, identifying key issues that require attention in regulating labor relations within this economic model. The paper initially outlines the opportunities and challenges that the gig economy presents to Vietnam’s labor market; however, it does not propose specific solutions for Vietnam and its workforce to overcome these challenges.

Nguyen, T. H. N. (2022) in the article *“The Gig Economy in Vietnam: Opportunities and Challenges”* – *Journal of Economics and Forecasting*, analyzed the current state of the gig economy in Vietnam, including the increase in the number of freelance workers, the

proliferation of platform-based technologies, and their impacts on the labor market. The study proposed solutions such as improving the legal framework, ensuring the rights of gig workers, and promoting skills development and vocational training.

L, T. T. H. (2021), “The Gig Economy in Vietnam: Opportunities and Challenges in the Digital Era” – Journal of Development and Integration, focused on the role of digital technology in the growth of the gig economy, as well as challenges related to social insurance and stable income for freelance workers. The proposed solutions include developing a flexible social insurance system, supporting the enhancement of digital skills, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders.

Chan, V. T. (2020), “The Gig Economy in Vietnam: Trends and Policy Directions” – Journal of Labor and Social Affairs, assessed the development trends of the gig economy from the perspectives of the labor market, enterprises, and policy. The proposed measures include improving the legal framework, strengthening skills training, and formulating appropriate social welfare policies.

The Hanns Seidel Foundation, in its study “*Some Issues on Employment in the Freelance Economy (Gig Economy) in Vietnam*”, focused on specific cases such as ride-hailing drivers, technology-based delivery workers, and domestic helpers. The research clarified the nature of employment in the gig economy and labor-related issues within the scope of Hanoi city, and proposed several policy implications for gig employment in Vietnam.

The Regional Sustainable Development Research Institute has produced a series of studies, such as “*Some Theoretical Issues on the Contract Economy (Gig Economy)*”, “*Overview of the Theoretical Foundations of the Gig Economy*”, and “*The Gig Economy – Current Situation and Development Trends*”. Each study offers distinct perspectives on various aspects of the gig economy

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach to analyze and clarify the research problem. The data are primarily secondary, collected from reliable sources such as the General Statistics Office of Vietnam, as well as survey results from reputable organizations. In addition, to further illuminate certain aspects of the analysis, the study incorporates a questionnaire survey. The questionnaire was designed using Google Forms and distributed via links to representatives of various institutions, including universities, companies, and enterprises. The survey was conducted mainly in major cities such as Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Da Nang, and Hai Phong.

Results: The author obtained 490 valid responses in which all survey questions were fully answered. The aggregated information is summarized as follows in table 1:

Table 1.

Category	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
By gender	490	100
Male	213	43.5
Female	275	56.1
Other	2	0.4
By age group	490	100
15–17 years	49	10.0
18–25 years	206	42.1
26–35 years	91	18.6
36–45 years	80	16.4
Above 45 years	64	12.9
By educational level	490	100
High school graduate	70	14.2
Undergraduate	294	59.9
Postgraduate	112	22.7
Other	16	3.2
By location	490	100
Hanoi	191	38.9
Ho Chi Minh City	110	22.5
Hai Phong	49	10.0
Da Nang	35	7.1
Other	106	21.5

4. Research Findings

4.1 General Overview of the Gig Economy

At present, there is considerable debate surrounding the concept of the gig economy, and no universally accepted definition exists. For the purposes of this study, the gig economy is defined as economic activities in which individuals earn income by providing work, services, or goods on demand through digital platforms such as mobile applications or websites.

The gig economy is influenced by multiple factors, among which the most significant are:

First, the rapid development of digital technology and online platforms has facilitated direct connections between service providers and service users without the need for traditional intermediaries. Applications such as Grab, Be, Upwork, and Fiverr exemplify how technology has expanded employment opportunities, enabling workers to access markets more easily and to choose jobs that align with their skills and schedules. Digital technology has been—and continues to be—a driving force behind the rapid global expansion of the gig economy, offering workers high levels of flexibility and autonomy.

From the 490 survey responses collected by the author, 345 workers (accounting for 70.2%) reported that they had participated in or were currently engaged in online or app-based work—that is, work within the gig economy. Among them, workers aged 18–25 have been leveraging the advantages of the gig economy as a means to assert their identity and achieve financial independence, consistent with a “being in control of the game” mindset rather than adhering to traditional employment. The proportion of workers with university and

postgraduate degrees participating in the gig economy is also relatively high, indicating that the gig economy labor market is not limited to low-skilled workers but also serves as a platform for knowledge workers, particularly in fields such as online education, technology, and freelancing

Second, the flexibility of the labor market plays a crucial role in fostering the growth of the gig economy. As workers increasingly seek freedom, autonomy, and a balance between work and personal life, the gig model has become an attractive option. At the same time, enterprises have a growing demand for short-term, project-based labor in order to optimize costs and enhance operational flexibility.

Third, the legal framework and supportive policies are key determinants of the gig economy's sustainability. Establishing clear regulations on rights, obligations, social insurance, and income taxation for freelance workers will help protect them from occupational risks while creating a transparent and equitable environment for all stakeholders.

4.2 The Impact of the Gig Economy on the Traditional Labor Market in Vietnam

Positive Impacts

The gig economy has brought about significant changes in the structure of Vietnam's labor market, which is increasingly operating with greater flexibility and efficiency. The most notable positive impacts of the gig economy on the Vietnamese labor market include:

First, in terms of labor supply: The gig economy has enriched Vietnam's labor supply by attracting a diverse range of workers across all ages and educational levels to participate in the labor market. Its flexibility and diversity allow workers to provide their services and labor to multiple clients simultaneously; they can also engage in various jobs within the same time frame, as long as they fulfill the agreed-upon tasks.

Survey results conducted by the author indicate that, among 490 respondents, 345 individuals reported participating in the gig economy to varying degrees (engaging in one job, combining multiple jobs, working full-time, or part-time)—accounting for 70.2% of the sample. Of these, those holding two or more jobs constituted as much as 73%, often in the form of combining studies with part-time work such as delivery, transportation, or temporary tutoring.

A survey conducted by the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs and the Institute of Labour Science and Social Affairs indicates that approximately 65–70% of gig workers in Vietnam find jobs through online applications. Nearly 30% have undertaken assignments in provinces or cities other than their place of residence, and around 5–7% have worked online for foreign clients. Notably, workers who secure contracts outside their locality or internationally tend to earn an average monthly income 1.2–1.5 times higher than those working solely within their local area. This demonstrates that the flexibility and market expansion potential of the gig economy not only enable workers to optimize their income but also create opportunities for deeper integration into global labor value chains.

The labor supply within Vietnam's gig economy is becoming increasingly abundant and

diverse, driven not only by the participation of young workers but also by the involvement of various specific labor groups. As of the end of 2023, women accounted for approximately 48% of the national labor force (General Statistics Office), with many opting for flexible jobs such as online sales, caregiving services, tutoring, design, and translation—fields well-suited to flexible time and location requirements. In addition, Vietnam has about 7 million persons with disabilities, representing 6.11% of the population aged two and above, with 31.7% participating in the labor force. The development of digital platforms and remote work models has created more suitable employment opportunities for this group, particularly in roles that do not require extensive mobility. Consequently, gig work that can be performed from home enables workers with disabilities to overcome barriers inherent in traditional jobs, thereby enhancing autonomy and fostering more stable livelihoods. This not only facilitates better social integration and a fuller, more fulfilling life for persons with disabilities but also helps reduce the burden on social welfare systems

In addition, the elderly population—comprising more than 12 million individuals aged 60 and above, equivalent to approximately 12% of the total population—has been actively engaging in part-time work, consultancy, training, and handicraft production. These activities not only leverage their existing experience and skills but also accommodate their health conditions and time availability. The integration of these labor groups not only expands the overall labor supply within the gig economy but also contributes to enhancing the inclusiveness and sustainability of Vietnam's labor market.

In Vietnam, the gig economy, with its flexibility in both working hours and modalities, has not only increased the number of participants in the labor market but also significantly expanded the total number of labor hours supplied. Notably, more than 60% of workers in the ride-hailing and technology-based delivery sectors in Vietnam work outside standard office hours, with approximately 25–30% regularly working evening or night shifts to meet the heightened demand for transportation and delivery services during these periods. This flexibility not only enables workers to optimize their income but also allows individuals with primary jobs or daytime commitments to participate in the labor market, thereby substantially increasing both the scale and diversity of the labor supply in Vietnam's gig economy.

Second, in terms of labor demand: The gig economy is contributing significantly to expanding both the scale and flexibility of Vietnam's labor market, enabling the provision of a diverse range of job types for workers. By the end of 2024, there were approximately 940,078 active enterprises nationwide, of which nearly 98% were small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)—a group with a high demand for flexible, cost-effective human resource solutions. Online platforms such as Vlance, FreelancerViet, Fastwork, Grab, and ShopeeFood allow businesses to list and categorize tasks, thereby selecting workers based on their qualifications and desired remuneration. As a result, many small enterprises can reduce recruitment costs by 20–30% compared to traditional methods, while also saving on training expenses by hiring workers who already possess the requisite skills. Adjusting labor demand has thus become faster and more flexible, which is particularly beneficial for small and micro-enterprises that need to optimize resources. The development of the gig economy not only helps businesses save costs and time but also expands employment opportunities for

millions of workers across various sectors, thereby fostering economic growth and enhancing the competitiveness of Vietnam's labor market.

Moreover, the gig economy serves as an environment in which labor demand in Vietnam can grow robustly in both scale and quantity, expanding across geographical and temporal dimensions. In Vietnam, the participation of online platforms (such as Grab, Now, Lazada, and Shopee) has effectively connected labor supply and demand, thereby both expanding opportunities for contract-based workers and providing businesses with greater access to workers possessing the specific skills they require. For simple tasks, businesses can allocate work to low-skilled labor at lower wages. Conversely, assignments requiring higher qualifications, experience, and competencies can be sourced from experts worldwide, thanks to globalization and the rapid advancement of communication technologies.

Indeed, non-traditional forms of work enable enterprises—particularly small businesses—to access a labor pool with specialized skills. In the absence of a healthy market for contract-based work, these enterprises might otherwise be compelled to hire full-time employees, thereby increasing operational costs. In other words, intermediary platforms combined with modern technological applications have facilitated more efficient connections between workers and businesses. The growth of Vietnam's nighttime economy has also been driven, in part, by the gig economy. Large enterprises with a demand for high-quality, knowledge-based labor can readily source talent both domestically and internationally, as the gig economy allows such workers to operate remotely.

Third, in terms of pricing and wages in the labor market: The gig economy enhances flexibility in negotiating and determining prices and wages within Vietnam's labor market. Through online platforms, labor supply and demand can meet quickly and transparently. Workers are able to access jobs that align with their needs and preferences in terms of time, job nature, and remuneration. They are not bound by long-term contracts or fixed salaries; instead, they have the right to choose and negotiate to achieve optimal working conditions. With dozens of gig work platforms currently operating in Vietnam—from transportation services (Grab, Be) and delivery services (ShopeeFood, AhaMove) to online freelance marketplaces (Vlance, FreelancerViet)—over 70% of gig workers report that they can independently negotiate rates or select jobs offering remuneration that meets their expectations.

The author's survey results indicate that, among the 345 respondents engaged in gig economy work, 27.9% reported earning less than VND 5 million per month—most of whom were students balancing both study and part-time employment. While this income level is not high, it nonetheless represents a meaningful contribution to improving students' living standards.

Those earning between VND 5–10 million per month and VND 10–15 million per month accounted for 56.7% of the surveyed sample. According to open-ended responses in the questionnaire, the majority of workers in this group were either holding two jobs simultaneously (a primary job and a secondary job) or working exclusively in a single freelance occupation (such as delivery or transportation).

Only a small proportion of respondents reported monthly incomes exceeding VND 20 million. In practice, achieving this income level often requires considerable trade-offs in terms of time and physical effort.

For enterprises—particularly newly established, small, and micro-enterprises, which account for 98% of all businesses in Vietnam—the gig economy offers opportunities to access human resources aligned with their limited financial capacity. Hiring gig workers enables these businesses to save 20–30% in personnel costs compared to traditional recruitment methods, while also allowing them to flexibly select “service packages” ranging from basic to premium, depending on their needs. On freelance job platforms, the same type of task—such as logo design—can be priced anywhere from VND 500,000 to several million, enabling businesses to balance budget constraints with desired quality.

Negative Impacts

Alongside its positive contributions to Vietnam’s labor market, the gig economy also generates certain negative effects, significantly influencing two key stakeholders in the labor market: workers and enterprises.

First, it limits individual career development opportunities. A defining characteristic of the gig economy is that work tends to be short-term, flexible, and easily transferable. While this offers adaptability, it also has a notable impact on the quality of labor supply in the market. The temporary nature of such jobs often reduces workers’ motivation to invest in long-term professional skill development.

A 2023 survey by the Institute of Labour Science and Social Affairs revealed that more than 58% of gig workers in Vietnam admitted to rarely or never participating in advanced skills training, primarily due to concerns about the instability of their current jobs and the possibility of losing them at any time. In particular, among ride-hailing and delivery drivers, the rate of participation in specialized skills training was below 20%.

This creates a vicious cycle: although upskilling could improve productivity and income, workers remain hesitant, fearing that if they lose their jobs, the investment will not yield commensurate benefits. In fact, a 2024 report by the *Journal of Economics and Forecasting* indicated that over 65% of gig workers were uncertain whether they would remain in their current jobs for more than 12 months, making investment in specialized skills less attractive.

As a result, the gig economy risks producing a workforce lacking in-depth expertise, unable to meet the demands of high-skill industries. In the long term, this not only restricts individual career advancement but also undermines socio-economic growth momentum, as the competitiveness of human resources becomes heavily influenced by workers’ subjective perceptions and “short-term” mindset.

Second, the lack of worker protection policies One of the major limitations of the gig economy in Vietnam is the absence of worker protection policies equivalent to those in the formal labor sector. Such policies include employment contracts, social security schemes, and support mechanisms such as paid leave, maternity leave, occupational accident benefits, and

health insurance. However, the majority of current gig jobs do not come with these entitlements, leaving workers vulnerable to financial and health-related risks.

The research team's survey of 345 respondents yielded similar findings: only 28% of gig workers had signed employment contracts, 47% had no contract at all, and 25% worked under verbal agreements. This lack of formal arrangements is accompanied by unstable income and the absence of other social security benefits.

According to a 2023 survey by the Institute of Labour Science and Social Affairs, over 90% of gig workers in Vietnam do not participate in compulsory social insurance, and more than 80% lack any form of health insurance. In particular, ride-hailing and delivery drivers—who constitute a large proportion of the gig workforce—rarely enjoy benefits such as paid leave, sick leave, or income support in the event of occupational accidents.

A 2024 report by the *Saigon Economic Times* also highlighted that, due to the absence of formal employment contracts, gig workers are often not protected under the Labor Code, preventing them from claiming compensation or allowances when cooperation is terminated abruptly. This exacerbates income and livelihood instability, forcing many to work at high intensity to offset risks, yet without a “safety net” in times of crisis.

As a result, while the gig economy offers flexible employment opportunities, it also creates a significant social protection gap. This calls for the State and platform enterprises to urgently develop an appropriate legal framework and protective policies to ensure basic rights for this rapidly growing segment of the workforce.

Third, the labor supply–demand relationship is becoming increasingly unsustainable. In the gig economy, the relationship between workers and employers tends to be less stable than in the traditional labor market, as supply and demand are primarily connected through technology platforms. Consequently, the binding commitments between the two parties are looser and not anchored in long-term agreements.

From the workers' perspective, in addition to risks related to social protection, they face the possibility of being replaced immediately after completing a job, as the hiring party may choose not to maintain contact or re-engage them.

The author's survey results show that 30.7% of gig workers perceive their jobs and income as unstable. A 2023 survey by the Institute of Labour Science and Social Affairs found that more than 60% of gig workers had experienced situations in which they were not assigned further work after completing a short-term contract. Low-skilled workers in the transportation and delivery services sector—who make up a large proportion of the gig workforce—are the most affected, as their income depends entirely on the number of orders or trips completed. Data from the Vietnam Automobile Transport Association indicate that the average monthly income of ride-hailing drivers ranges from VND 8–12 million, but if they take a few days off, their income drops to nearly zero.

From the business perspective, particularly for enterprises that rely heavily on seasonal labor, the risk of workforce fluctuation is substantial. According to a 2024 report by the *Journal of*

Economics and Forecasting, more than 55% of businesses hiring workers through digital platforms reported difficulties in maintaining a stable workforce, as workers can leave at any time or work simultaneously for multiple applications. This makes it challenging for businesses to control service quality and increases recruitment and training costs to replace departing workers.

Thus, while the flexibility of the gig economy offers advantages in quickly connecting labor supply and demand, it also undermines the sustainability of labor relations—especially for low-income workers and in service sectors that are heavily dependent on seasonal labor.

5. Recommendations

The gig economy in Vietnam is developing rapidly, robustly, and inevitably, shaped by technological, demographic, and global factors. However, to ensure that the gig economy generates more positive impacts on Vietnam's labor market, several fundamental measures should be prioritized:

First, improve the legal framework and protection policies for platform-based workers. The State should establish specific regulations for this labor group, including transparent electronic contracts, dispute resolution mechanisms, and the inclusion of minimum social protection benefits. Drawing on the “economically dependent worker” model adopted in certain countries could help safeguard basic rights while preserving market flexibility.

Second, strengthen social security for freelance workers by expanding voluntary social insurance schemes with flexible contribution rates suited to unstable incomes. Technology platforms should be encouraged—or required—to co-contribute to insurance alongside workers, while also establishing emergency support funds for cases of accidents, illness, or job loss.

Third, enhance workers' skills and adaptability through short-term training programs in digital skills, personal financial management, and specialized vocational competencies. Diversifying income sources and avoiding reliance on a single platform will help workers mitigate the risk of sudden job loss.

Fourth, enterprises should stabilize their labor supply by implementing retention bonuses, creating transparent two-way evaluation systems, and investing in platform-based human resource management technologies to optimize job allocation. This approach will help retain high-quality workers while reducing recruitment and retraining costs.

Finally, strengthen the role of worker representative organizations by encouraging the formation of platform worker associations or unions, thereby creating regular dialogue channels between the State, platforms, and workers. Such mechanisms will serve as vital bridges for negotiating rights, resolving conflicts, and adjusting policies in a timely manner, moving toward a more sustainable and equitable gig labor market.

6. Conclusion

The development of the gig economy is inevitable, particularly in the context of rapid digital

technology advancement. Countries worldwide, including Vietnam, cannot remain outside this trend. This paper has examined both the positive and negative impacts of the gig economy on Vietnam's labor market. The research findings offer policy-makers insights into strategies for optimizing the development of Vietnam's labor market, thereby maximizing human resource potential in the digital era.

The use of survey data from major cities has largely enabled the paper to clarify the key issues under analysis; however, incorporating survey results from other provinces—especially those where technology adoption remains limited—would allow for a more comprehensive assessment of the gig economy in Vietnam.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Macrothink Institute.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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